

"BETTER Reasons Why! - Captain Nolan and the Charge of the Light Brigade"

by Dr Douglas J Austin

Thanks to Tennyson's poem, the phrase "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*" has entered the English language. From the moment it took place - and to this day - that action has rightly been enshrined as a triumph of discipline and bravery in the face of extreme danger. Although a minor incident, it has also been a matter of serious and lasting controversy. The best and most recent full accounts of the whole day's events, including the "*Charge*" itself, are those by John Barham¹ and Robert Kershaw². My present concern is with the events before this action (often the only "*Reason Why*" the Crimean War is called to mind). Beginning in 2003, I have acquired robust evidence from hitherto unrecognised archives and from many generous persons. My published articles have appeared in "The War Correspondent" - the Journal of the Crimean War Research Society (CWRS). I have included full copies of them, together with my unpublished articles on aspects of the battle, in my Internet Archive from which they can be downloaded in PDF or other format³. They include complete references and acknowledgements.

The Battle of Balaklava took place to the north and north-east of Balaklava in the Crimea on Wednesday October 25th, 1854. At 5 a.m., a strong mixed force of some 25,000 Russian infantry, artillery and cavalry under General Liprandi left the villages of Chorgun and Karlovka. This was a destructive thrust against the main British supply base in the Anglo-French attack on Sevastopol - the major Russian naval base in the Black Sea.

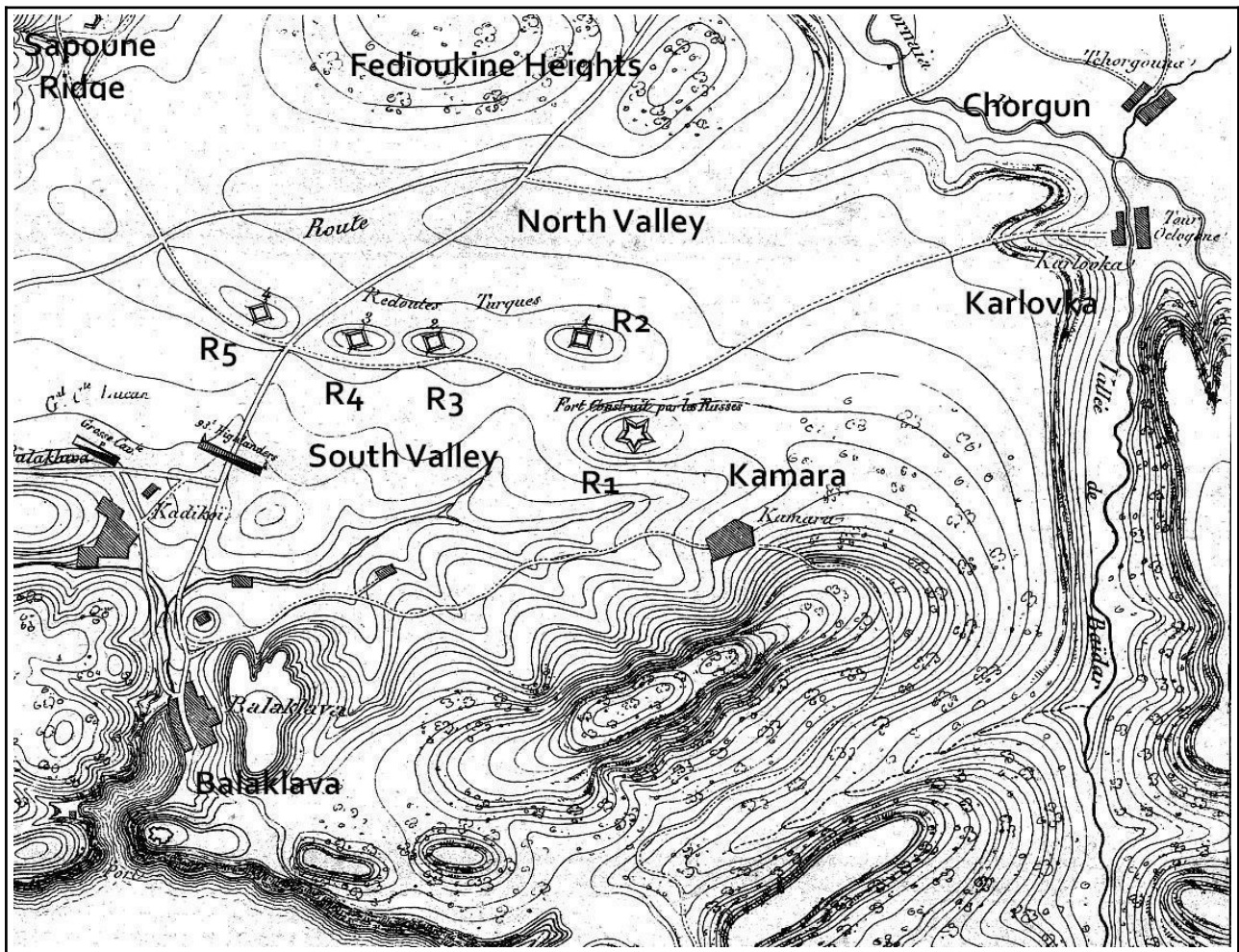


Figure 1 : Edited extract from Blondel (French) Military Map: Issued 23rd November 1854

The immediate Russian task was to neutralise a hastily-built and feeble line of redoubts on an E-W ridge (the "Causeway Heights") across the valley of Balaklava : **R1-R5** (provided with ten 12-lb iron guns of position distributed 3, 2, 2, 3, 0), as shown in **Figure 1**. That line was manned by some 1500 low-grade Turkish Esnan infantry plus higher-grade reserve gunners. They were placed there on the orders of Lord Raglan, the British Commander-in-Chief, in response to menacing movements to the north-east of Balaklava and to repeated warnings from its defenders. At first light (6.43 am), a large Russian battery posted near Kamara opened a severe direct artillery barrage on R1. The Turks in **R1** resisted bravely for ca. 1¼ hours but were overwhelmed by a massive infantry attack. As they ran off to the south and south-west about 8 am, leaving 170 dead, their compatriots in **R2**, **R3** and **R4** abandoned their posts in disarray - attracting long-held contempt and distrust. It appears that British troops spiked the guns in **R1**, **R2** and **R3** (not **R4**) before themselves escaping.

Five men were directly involved in the most (in)famous event of the Battle of Balaklava. They were General Lord Raglan (C-in-C), Brigadier-General Sir Richard Airey (QMG/Chief of Staff), Lieutenant-General the 3rd Earl of Lucan (commanding both British Cavalry Brigades), Major-General the 7th Earl of Cardigan (commanding the Light Cavalry Brigade) and Captain Lewis Edward Nolan, 15th Hussars (ADC to Brigadier-General Airey).

The guns of a British Artillery regiment are its colours – to lose them is the ultimate disgrace. Raglan was the Commanding General and, significantly, also Master-General of the Ordnance – responsible for all British artillery, engineers, fortifications, military supplies, transport, field hospitals and much else. At ca. 8 am, from high on the Sapoune Ridge above the North Valley, he sent verbal orders to the 1st and 4th Divisions to descend from the Sevastopol siege lines, via the Col, onto the Plain of Balaklava. The 1st (under the Duke of Cambridge) obeyed quite promptly but the 4th (under Lt General Sir George Cathcart) refused to move until a written order was received at 8.45 am.⁴ The Russians captured **R1-R4** and withdrew from **R4**. They then sent two cavalry units under Rihov towards Balaklava. At ca. 9.05, the smaller unit (4 squadrons) advanced towards the 93rd Highlanders, who beat them off with vigorous fire from their Pattern 1851 Minié 0.702 bore Rifle-Muskets ("*The Thin Red Line*"). The British cavalry (the Heavy Brigade commanded by Brigadier-General Scarlett and the Light Brigade by Lord Cardigan) were commanded by Lord Lucan. At ca. 9.10, the larger Russian unit (16 squadrons) advanced south between **R4** and **R5**, but were utterly routed by the uncoordinated and outnumbered – but outstandingly successful – "*Charge of the Heavy Brigade*", which deserves more recognition than it has ever received. The Light Brigade entirely failed to follow up that advantage, although Captain William Morris (17th Lancers) urged such action. Cardigan was criticised thereafter but he claimed (perhaps rightly) that Lucan had ordered him not to move from his position.

At or shortly after 10 a.m., the 1st Division of infantry, closely followed by the 4th, began to descend into the South Valley. Captain Robert Portal (4th Light Dragoons) wrote to his mother on 26 October, 1854:- "Well, about an hour afterwards (i.e. after the Charge of the Heavy Brigade) we saw that their Cavalry had formed up in line across a plain, with hills on both sides of it, about a mile from where our Light Cavalry was stationed; a certain Captain Nolan, who is well-known in the army, and who is A.D.C. to General Airey, and who is supposed to be a very dashing Cavalry officer, came up to Lord Lucan and said that the General desired the Light Cavalry would attack to their front at once. Lord Lucan and Lord Cardigan said: 'It seems madness to attack at such a distance without sufficient support of Infantry and Artillery, and we don't know what they may have stationed among the trees on the sides of those hills.' However, Nolan came back shortly afterwards with a written order, which he gave to Lord Lucan, that the Light Cavalry were to attack."⁵ The memoirs of Captain George Higginson of the Grenadier Guards include:- "We had proceeded rather more than halfway when I met Captain Nolan riding up from the lower ground, apparently in search of the adjutant-general. As Captain Nolan's name has acquired great prominence, he being the officer who conveyed to Lord Lucan the ambiguously worded order which led to the annihilation of the Light Cavalry Brigade, I do not cast any reflection on his memory by recording the impression he gave me during the short conversation we held together, that under the stress of some great excitement he had lost self-command."⁶ I believe that Nolan's furious wish was to locate the Adjutant-General James Estcourt (in charge of disciplinary affairs, etc.) and to report the direct refusal by Lucan and Cardigan to obey that verbal order from Airey at Raglan's command. Thereby, those cavalry generals defied the "*Queen's Regulations*" specific instruction that "ALL Orders sent by

Aides-de-Camp are to be delivered in the plainest terms, and are to be obeyed with the same readiness as if delivered personally by the General Officers to whom such Aides-de-Camp are attached." That clear-cut regulation was to play an important part in the later events of the day.



Figure 2 : Captain Lewis Edward Nolan

Captain Louis (Lewis) Edward Nolan (1818-1854) was an intelligent, experienced and spirited officer in the 15th Hussars, well-liked by many in the British and French higher commands (although some officers affected an aristocratic disdain). He held a great (perhaps excessive) belief in the capabilities of cavalry. He had served in the Austrian army and, for many years, in India. Furthermore, he had published two books on cavalry topics before being specially selected to acquire horses for the British campaign in the Crimea. His life and career are fully presented in "Messenger of Death" by David Buttery.⁷ and his campaign diary (expressing his very low opinion of Lord Lucan) is available as "Expedition to the Crimea" edited by Alan J Guy and Alastair Massie.⁸ A side-light on Nolan's character was given by Captain Charles Walpole Hinxman, his comrade from their years together in India. Hinxman wrote, in "The Times" for 20th November, 1854, "I am sure you will not allow the serious imputation of giving a false order to tarnish the name of a most devoted and chivalrous officer. I have known Captain Nolan from our earliest years, and I know that his ideas of discipline and passive obedience to

superiors in command were carried to perhaps an extreme point. Brave as the utter absence of all sensibility to fear could render any man, he was by no means rash or inclined to act on the inspiration of a momentary enthusiasm; I very much doubt therefore that he should have assumed the unbecoming responsibility of urging Lord Lucan to any course which that General officer did not himself think fit to pursue." ⁹

After the "*Charge of the Heavy Brigade*", Lord Raglan and others observed that the Russians were preparing to remove some of the British guns from the redoubts. According to William Howard Russell of "*The Times*", "Lord Raglan was by no means at ease. There was no trace of the divine calm attributed to him by his admirers as his characteristic in moments of trial. His anxious mien as he turned his glass from point to point, consulting with Generals Airey, Estcourt, and others of his staff, gave me a notion that he was in "trouble." Perhaps he alone, of all the group on the spot, fully understood the gravity of the situation."¹⁰ Raglan anxiously insisted that that apparent removal of trophy guns must be prevented and that **R1** should be recovered. The French C-in-C, General François Canrobert, normally cautious and indecisive, highly congratulated Raglan on the brilliant charge of his heavy cavalry but insisted on the tactical needlessness of any new offensive - given the lack of resources both to recover and to hold the redoubts. Raglan rejected this sound advice and, at his request, Canrobert agreed to permit Raglan to use elements of the French Chasseurs d'Afrique cavalry. ¹¹

An eye witness, Brigadier-General Sir Hugh Rose (British Queen's Commissioner to the French HQ) recorded in his diary:- "Lord Raglan, said "We must set the poor Turks right again, get the Redoubt (**R1**) back." Airey told Lord Raglan that he (**Airey**) meant to take the Redoubt back; "Here, I will write the Order. Give me a bit of paper." He said to Nolan "guns give him that." Nolan was much excited; "I'll lead them myself, I'll take & lead them on!".¹²

Brigadier-General Richard Airey, QMG acting as Raglan's Chief of Staff, gave Nolan verbal instructions and, as an afterthought, hastily wrote out in pencil perhaps the worst-drafted order in British military history:- "Lord Raglan wishes the Cavalry to advance rapidly to the front - follow the Enemy & try to prevent the Enemy carrying away the Guns Troop Horse Ally may accompany - French Cavalry is on Yr left - R Airey Immediate". This was the 4th Order to the Cavalry. While not ordering an attack as such, it did not precisely define the direction of advance or, indeed, the nationality of the guns being (or shortly to be) removed! He failed to add the single word "English" or "British" to the order. It did not inform Lucan that he could create simultaneous advances against the Fedioukine and Causeway Heights by using the 4th Chasseurs d'Afrique - which were at British disposal. Specifically as written, it makes no sense at all. Lucan later informed the House of Lords (19 March, 1855):- "General Airey told me this, - "I first of all communicated the order verbally to Captain Nolan. Captain Nolan turned his horse and was galloping away, when I called him back and put it in writing." and "Shall I be told that Captain Nolan was not in General Airey's confidence? Why, he told me himself that he had given to Captain Nolan his instructions verbally, and it was only when that officer was turning his horse away, that he detained him, and committed the instructions to writing.' (*Raglan may have*

insisted on the addition of the word 'Immediate'.) Lieutenant Calthorpe, one of Raglan's ADCs, later wrote that "Previous to his departure, he (Nolan) received careful instructions both from Lord Raglan and the Quartermaster-General." Accordingly, I can assert that Nolan was given detailed verbal instructions supplementary to the written order for Lucan. Furthermore, Raglan called to Nolan "Tell Lord Lucan that the cavalry is attack immediately!" as Nolan started down the face of the Sapoune Ridge.¹³ The 4th Order was written shortly before 11 a.m, and delivered to Lucan at ca. 11.00 am. Lucan wrote to Raglan, on 30th November, 1854, that "The Aide-de-Camp, in a most authoritative Tone, stated that they were Lord Raglan's Orders that the cavalry should attack immediately".¹⁴

I have published the "*Crimean War Reminiscences*" of young John Elijah Blunt (Consular Service), Lucan's civilian interpreter in the Crimea.¹⁵ (This is available for purchase as **SP33** via the CWRS website.) With much else, they include a first-hand eyewitness account of the moment when, on the field of Balaklava, Captain Nolan delivered the fatal 4th Order to Lord Lucan. Blunt wrote: "After witnessing with bated breath and thrilling sensations this brilliant (Heavy Brigade) charge, a sight never to be forgotten, I rode on to report to Lord Lucan and, on my way, over part of the ground the enemy had crossed in his flight, some stragglers pursued by our troopers passed close by me...After delivering a message to the Pasha, I followed Lord Lucan and some of his Staff to a small hillock between redoubts **No.4** and **No.5** from where we saw the Guards and other Regiments descending from Sebastopol plateau into the plain. As most of the Staff had been sent with orders to the Cavalry Brigades, only the Second Aide-de-Camp (Captain the Honourable Charteris) myself and an Orderly [Trumpet Major Henry Joy (17th Lancers)] remained with Lord Lucan, when shortly after Captain Nolan rode up close to his Lordship, saluted and delivered to him a written order from Lord Raglan. After reading the order Lord Lucan had a discussion with Nolan, who, pointing to the Russian position in an excited manner, I heard him exclaim vehemently, 'There, My Lord, is your enemy, there are your guns'. His Lordship was surprised and appeared to be irritated by the very impetuous and disrespectful attitude and tone of Captain Nolan, looked at him sternly but made no answer, and after some hesitation, proceeded to give orders to Lord Cardigan to charge the enemy with the Light Brigade and to the Heavy Brigade to advance in support, and at the same time went to accompany the latter." I specially note that Lucan made no answer to Nolan, who was thereby given no opportunity to pass on further instructions.

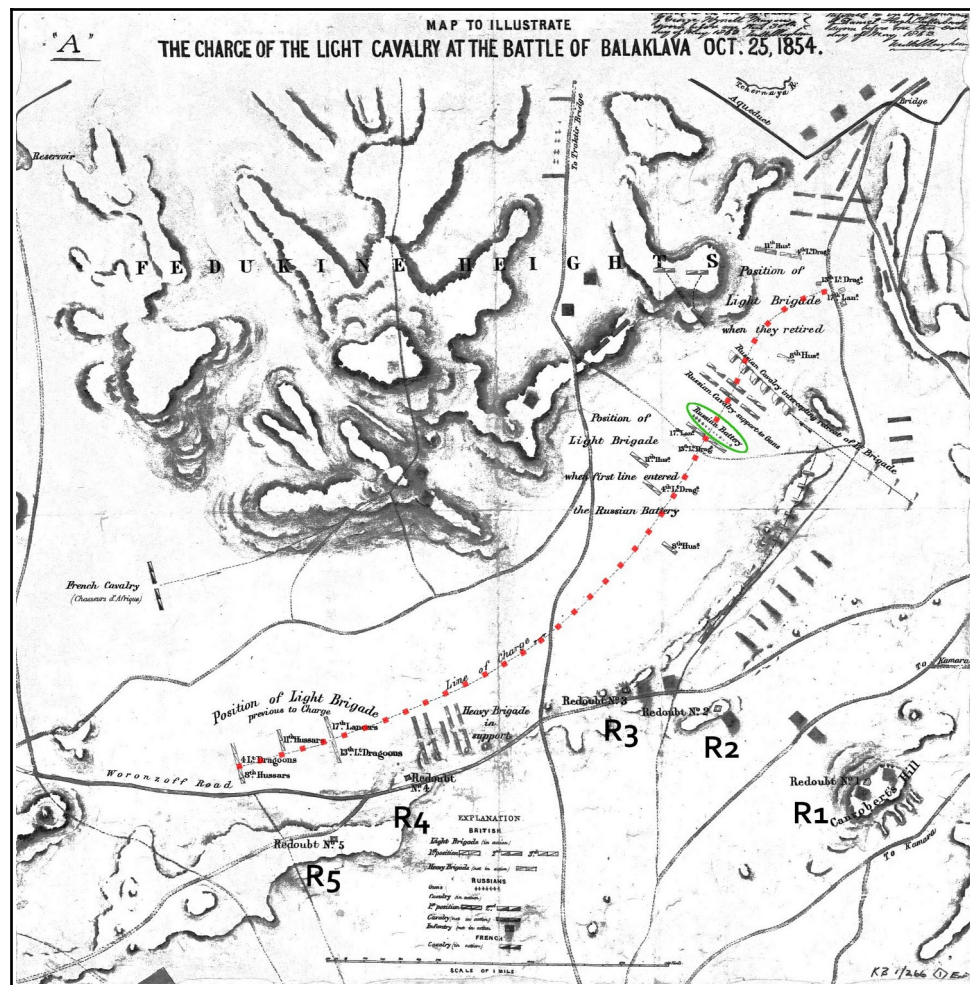


Figure 3 : Mayow Map (National Archives, Kew : MPN 1-23) from 1863 Affidavit .

The Russian Don No. 3 Heavy Battery (Green oval) is shown backed by Russian Cavalry.

The best available full map of "The Charge" is shown in **Figure 3**. One of my photographs from the Russian Memorial on R4 at Balaklava (taken due West with 12x optical zoom) shows a plausible candidate for Blunt's 'small hillock' (see **Figure 4**). I used Professor Peter Guth's excellent MICRODEM software¹⁶ with Shuttle Radar Topographic Mission (SRTM 3-arc-second) data to visualise the year 2000 landforms, profiles and lines-of-sight along and around the Causeway Heights. I wrote "I must stress that Nolan reportedly offered to join the Cavalry advance as a guide and may have been specifically authorised and instructed to do so. He rode down the face of the Sapoune Ridge and met Lucan on a small hillock between Redoubts 4 and 5, possibly near the present location of the British Balaklava Monument."¹⁷ [Later, Raglan **very falsely** reported that Nolan had exceeded his authority as an ADC.¹⁸] Given the clear-cut rise and fall of the vine-posts, not covered by vigorous plant growth in late May, Figure 4 shows the existence of a modest swell of ground (**BH**) slightly to the south of the **R5-R4** direct line and in a location apparently undisturbed by later ground works. **BH** is located ca. 225 m (246 yd) from the **R5** monument and ca. 629 m (688 yd) from the **R4** memorial.



Figure 4: Enlargement of 12x Zoom View with "**BH**" marked.

Assuming that 'Blunt's Hillock' has been identified, the question arises:- Why would Lucan have been there? I infer that Lucan was very well-placed at **BH**, because he could directly observe Russian operations near and to the south of **R1**, **R2** and **R3**. Equally, by moving a short distance to the north, he would have the whole North Valley in view. The specific immediacy of Raglan's 4th Order, vehemently urged by Nolan, appears to have prompted the undelayed (and ill-directed) despatch of Light and Heavy Cavalry Brigade troops into the North Valley killing ground. **Figure 5** shows the contours around **BH** and the surface profiles towards the eastern end of the North Valley. Those profiles indicate that, from **BH**, the northerly swell of **R4** blocks direct sight beyond 750 m (820 yd) in that direction, specifically including "**B**" - the location of the Russian Don No. 3 Heavy Battery. The regrouped Russian cavalry was disposed to the east behind that battery. The eastern end of the North Valley is not visible, while the Col - to the west of Balaklava - is certainly visible from **BH**.

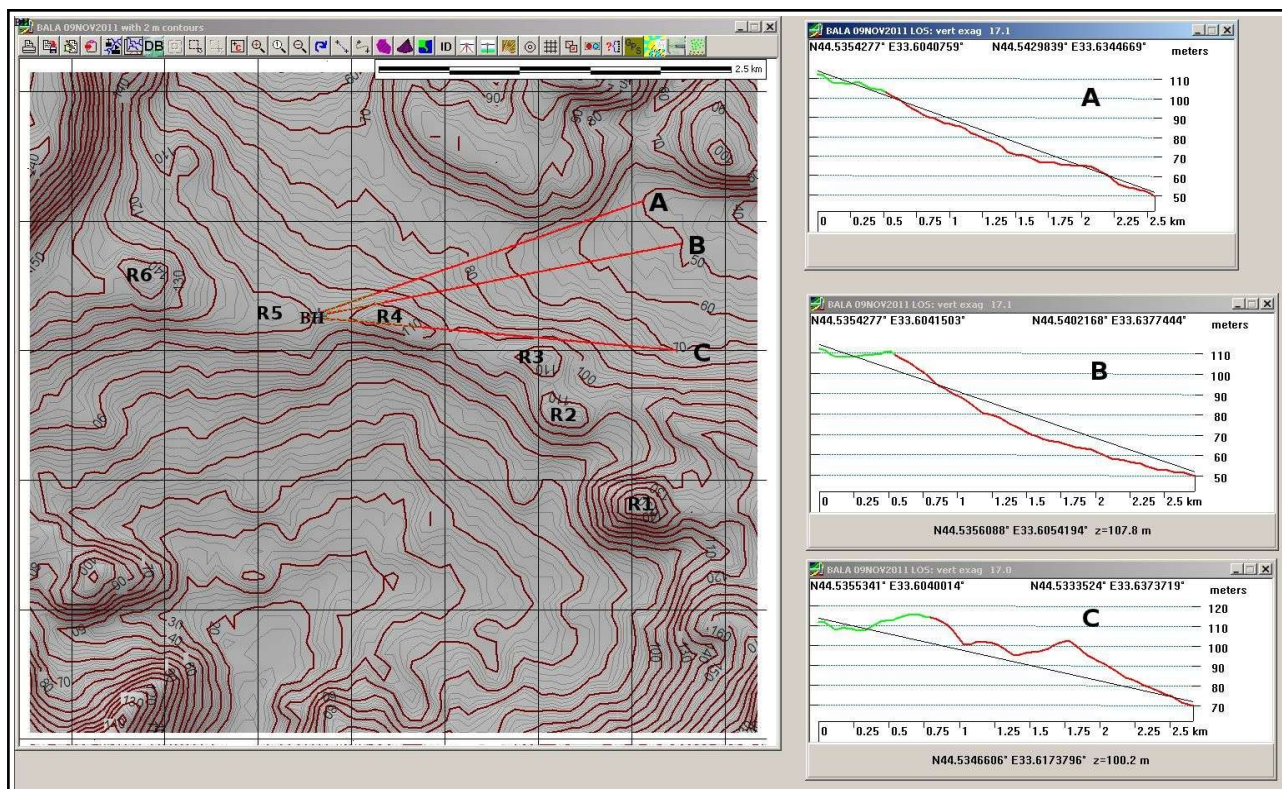


Figure 5 : Surface profiles from **BH** towards the Eastern end of the North Valley.

(Green = Visible: Red = Obscured).

Blunt recorded that Nolan was given NO opportunity to press Airey's supplementary instructions on Lucan. Clearly, Lucan SHOULD (but did NOT) demand instant clarification from him. As the Light Brigade moved off to the east into a storm of gunfire and musketry, Nolan ordered the 17th Lancers to go "Three's right!" and pointed to the Causeway Heights.^{19, 20} By passing south-east over the Causeway Heights, the Light and Heavy Brigades would have been shielded from gunfire and could well have prevented the removal of the redoubt guns. That view was certainly advanced by Captain Arthur Tremayne of the 13th Light Dragoons when he wrote (after 1860):- "But I have no doubt that Lord Raglan's intentions were that Lord Lucan should, with some part of his Division advance, probably by way of the South valley, wheel over the Causeway and prevent the guns the Turks had left behind from being taken away. This Lord Raglan's A.D.C. Lord Westmorland (Lord Burghersh in 1854), subsequently told me. Lord Lucan could then have decided whether he could have gone on to the gorge of the North valley or not."²¹

In his detailed account of the battle, William Daverell Cattell, Assistant Surgeon in the 5th Dragoon Guards, left an important contemporary diagram which shows Nolan's track from the front of the 17th Lancers towards Lucan in the North Valley.²²

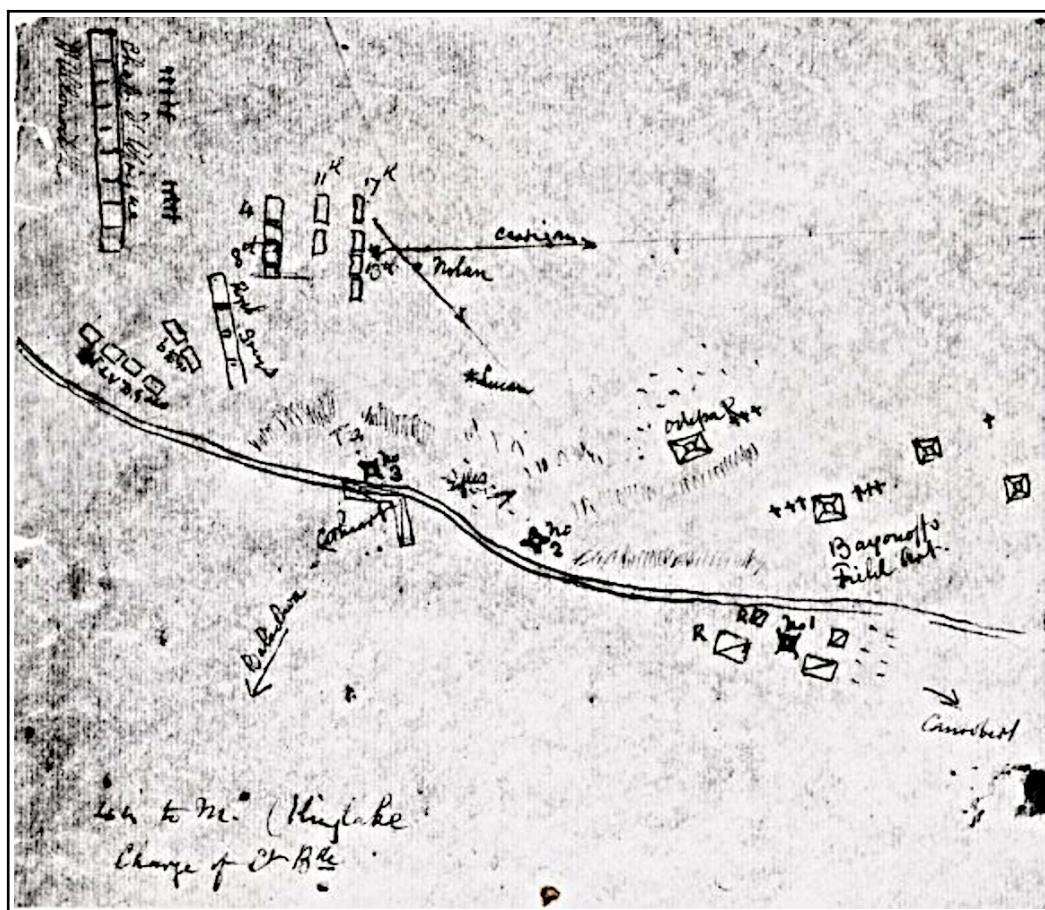


Figure 6 : Surgeon Cattell's sketch of the start of "The Charge"

From that, I believe that Nolan could have been heading towards Lucan and to re-direct the British cavalry into the South Valley. Support for this view comes from the article by the eye-witness Veterinary Surgeon Hicks Withers of the Royal Artillery:- "When the brigade moved off, Capt. Nolan fell in with the leaders, but seeing directly afterwards that, instead of inclining to the right in the direction of the captured guns and redoubts, they were taking a straight line to the entire Russian Army, he rushed his horse forward to the front of the column, crossing it waving his sword, and pointing the proper direction to take. At this moment he was hit, apparently badly, and, swaying in his saddle, fell to the ground; his foot caught in the stirrup iron, and the frightened horse, turning around kicking, galloped back to the rear, dragging with it the unfortunate officer, who, if not killed by the shot, undoubtedly was by the kicking animal."²³ The advancing - and soon charging - Light Brigade took very serious losses in men and horses. An outstanding example of discipline and bravery ended in bloody failure - even though it terrified the enemy. The Light Brigade did not prevent the enemy from carrying away the guns, which were later paraded in Sevastopol - to general rejoicing. At once - and to this day - Nolan was blamed for the misdirection and characterised as an insolent and insubordinate hothead or worse.

Brigadier-General Sir Hugh Rose, Queen's Commissioner to French Headquarters in the Crimea, also noted in his Journal for 25 October, 1854, that 'Ld Raglan, seemed agitated, took Airey aside and said 'They say that all

this happened on account of order you sent by Nolan to retake the guns.¹² Raglan spoke of the verbal order sent by Airey to 'retake' what could only have been captured British guns. That was the intent of the first order carried by Nolan - as described by Portal (see above). Most significantly, none of the four written orders to the Cavalry included any instruction to 'take' or 'retake' guns.' The 4th Order only required the cavalry to "...follow the Enemy & try to prevent the Enemy carrying away the Guns."

From this evidence, I am convinced that many contemporary and later accounts of the event (placing very serious blame on Nolan) were based on nothing more than re-cycled camp rumour. To quote "Anon"- *"The story, though it may have been doing the rounds for years, is unsubstantiated and very probably one of those baseless rumours that have become quasi-fact only through sheer force of repetition."* Sadly, some recent published books have perpetuated that myth. For example, Mark Adkin's book "The Charge: The Real Reason Why the Light Brigade was Lost", repeats - on p 242 of editions published in 1996, 2000 and 2004 - *"Nothing can be absolutely certain but the present writer believes that Nolan launched the Light Brigade down the North Valley knowing it was not Raglan's intention. He must therefore take the bulk of the blame for its loss."*²⁴ As recently as 2016, Saul David²⁵ and Patrick Sawyer²⁶ took Navy Lieutenant Frederick Maxse's and ADC Lt/Captain Nigel Kingscote's letters as evidence of precisely that. I emphatically **disagree** with those assessments. So also (and far more significantly) would the former troopers of the Light Brigade regiments who attended the 21st Anniversary celebrations of "The Charge", held at the Alexandra Palace, London, on 25th October 1875. Their celebrations featured a "Trophy" to the officers killed in "The Charge" (**Figure 7**). In it, pride of place was given to "Nolan", cheered by those attending.^{27, 28} If one of those officers was known, or even thought, to have directed the Light Brigade - whether wilfully or in error - to mutilation, death and (glorious?) failure, is it conceivable that the organisers would have marked him out for the ultimate accolade? Yet the officers named on the front of the Trophy were Winter, Charteris, Goad, Lockwood, Oldham, Webb and -

most prominently of all - Nolan.

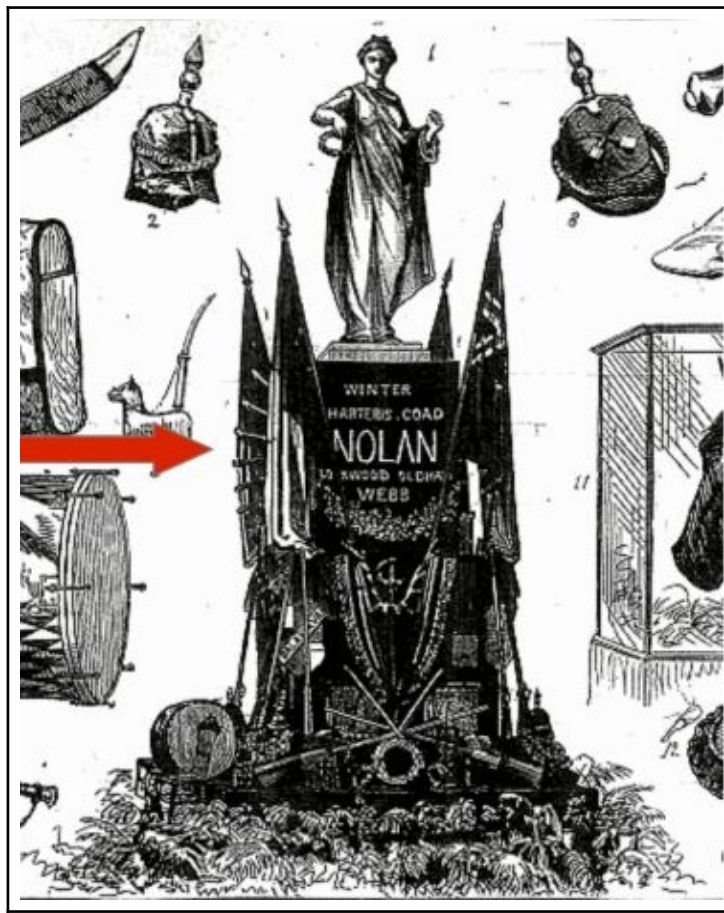


Figure 7: "*Illustrated London News*", 25th October, 1875

(Edited)

Further information appeared in Edward H. Nolan's "*The History of the War against Russia Illustrated*", Virtue, London. (1857), published shortly after the war. Some key points (which I underline) about the "Charge of the Light Brigade" appear on pp 546-547 of Volume I (Chapter. XLI)²⁹:- "...The author of these pages has good authority for saying that the noble lord was obliged to place his sword before some of those gallant men to keep them in their proper places, so eager were they for the formidable encounter. Before, however, the grand crash of the charge was felt, or filled the spectators with astonishment and awe, poor Nolan paid the penalty of his own urgency with his life. Many various accounts have been given of the way he fell. He has been generally represented as leading the brigade when he received his death-blow. Lord Cardigan has denied this, and stated that Nolan was not leading the brigade, but a considerable distance on the general's right, and in advance. In this case both accounts are true. There is no doubt that the intrepid horseman was far in advance, and determined to keep the lead until his sword met the enemy, but he fell before the actual charge commenced, and while (just as Lord Cardigan represented) his horse was prancing about. At the moment of his fall he had just waved his sword, and given a cheer, when the fatal blow performed its mission. In several of the published accounts, Lord Cardigan is represented as detracting from Captain Nolan's merit in the statements he gave of the position of that officer when he fell. We are in a condition to positively refute that calumny. So far from Lord Cardigan wishing to depreciate Captain Nolan, he has vindicated his memory; and, when living, showed his confidence and respect by offering to place him upon his own staff. The writer of this narrative has these facts from the lips of the noble earl himself, who could have no motive, unless it were a personal courtesy, in deviating from the sternest matter of truth in the case. The fall of this fine officer has been described as caused by a shell, which killed him on the spot. The true occasion of his untimely end was a fragment of a shell, which entered his breast. The shell had fallen midway between the spot where Lord Cardigan rode and that where the uneasy steed of Captain Nolan, sympathising with its rider, seemed with joy to anticipate the charge. When Captain Nolan was struck his sword dropped, and the reins fell from his hand. The horse, following the instincts generally shown on such occasions, turned from the battle. The brigade now coming up fast, opened to let him pass. He immediately threw up his arms with an expressive cry, as if dissuading them from their course. This he repeated as the second line opened to make way for him, and then fell from his horse. It was universally supposed by those of the brigade who survived, that in riding so far to the front his quick eye perceived the impregnable position of the enemy, and his imploring gestures

were intended to stop the cavalry from their self-immolating career. It is probable that the proud soldier dropped dead from his horse; for the general by whom that handful of men was so bravely led into the unequal struggle told the writer that, immediately on retiring from the charge, he saw the captain lying dead in a hollow, where he had fallen..."

The text above is nicely consistent with the evidence in my series that Nolan ordered at least the 17th Lancers to "*Threes right!*" - towards the Causeway Heights and into the South Valley. Once there, they could well have prevented the removal of British guns from Redoubts **3**, **2** and **1** (Canrobert's Hill) - thereby complying with Raglan's fatal 4th Order. I note that "*he fell before the actual charge commenced*". Part of the text clearly derives directly from Cardigan in person and I see no reason to discount it. Cardigan's statement of Nolan's position at the moment of his death accords well with other evidence, such as the contemporary diagram drawn by Surgeon Cattell's diagram²² - which he loaned to Alexander Kinglake and was crudely excerpted in Volume IV of "*The Invasion of the Crimea*" in 1868.

After his return to England following a Medical Board, Cardigan described the event to Queen Victoria on 16th January, 1855, as follows:- "He spoke of the unfortunate murderous Charge, for which, he told the Duke of Newcastle plainly, Ld Lucan was entirely to blame, by misconceiving Ld Raglan's orders, not obeying them, & not exposing himself. Ld Cardigan said that not one of the Officers who went into that action, he believed, ever thought they would return out of it alive! He was slightly wounded by 2 Cossacks, but thought of too little consequence to mention. His horse was not touched: The death of Capt: Nolan was one of the strangest things he knew. Ld Cardigan had ridden in front of him & had called to him: "Capt: Nolan, halt, I wish for some information," being anxious to know what Ld Raglan's real message had been; but Capt: Nolan would not listen, & before Ld Cardigan could speak again, a shell burst between their horses, with a tremendous explosion, Capt: Nolan throwing his arms up in the air, turning his horse round, & giving an appalling scream, road to the rear, where he almost immediately afterwards fell dead to the ground! Ld Cardigan had at first thought he was only slightly wounded, & could not hear pain."³⁰

More details of Nolan's fate occur in the "*Corrected Narrative*" , written by John Elijah Blunt (Lucan's civilian interpreter) in Appendix J4 of my CWRSP SP 33 'Blunt Speaking', 2006). In that, he stated:- "I only saw the beginning of the charge and could distinguish Lord Cardigan and Captain Nolan, at the head of the first Regiment [17th Lancers]...When the firing from the Fedoukhine heights was thus suppressed and I saw men of the Light Brigade, some of them wounded and unhorsed, returning from the Charge, I left the redoubt [**R5**] and walked down the hill towards them. On my way I met some Guardsmen who had just carried from the field the body of an Officer and on approaching them I at once recognised the body as that of Captain Nolan. His face was almost black, and his chest was lacerated and covered with blood. His death must have been instantaneous and caused, as I afterwards heard, by a shell bursting over or near him.¹ While I was looking at the body, H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, passing by with some of his Staff stopped and asked 'Who is that?' I replied 'Captain Nolan, Your Royal Highness'. He rode on exclaiming 'Poor Nolan! Poor Nolan!'. Poor Nolan, indeed! He was a general

favourite at Head Quarters; and was considered a Cavalry authority of great experience, having served in the Austro-Hungarian Army and in India. REF But, during his occasional visits to our camp at Balaklava, he used to speak very disparagingly of Lord Lucan as a Cavalry General. On one occasion I heard him remark to Major McMahon, A.Q.M.G. that had he (Nolan) commanded the Light Brigade at Alma, he would have pursued the Russians to the very gates of Sebastopol! His Lordship, however, did pursue the retreating Russians with some of his Squadrons, and while making some prisoners, he was recalled by Lord Raglan. I was near Lord Lucan when the recall order was delivered to him and witnessed his vexation at having to give up the pursuit. I should here mention the fact that Captain Nolan was one of the first, if not the first, victim of the charge of the Noble Six Hundred: when Lord Cardigan ordered the Brigade to advance, Captain Nolan bravely placed himself at the head of the leading Squadron and brandishing his sword, cheered on the men to the charge. Almost immediately after the Russian batteries opened fire, Captain Nolan was seen galloping to the rear and some of the men of the Squadron, ignorant at the time that he had been instantaneously killed by the splinters of a shell bursting over him, suspected that he was attempting to escape! His horse in the meantime becoming very excited by the bursting shells, and no longer under control, galloped to the rear carrying its gallant master's body, which at last fell from the saddle in the vicinity of the spot I saw it in charge of some Guardsmen..." [His body may have been buried in the ditch of **R5**.]

The National Army Museum, Chelsea, holds a document which accords well with Edward Nolan's text:- "*So far from Lord Cardigan wishing to depreciate Captain Nolan, he has vindicated his memory; and, when living, showed his confidence and respect by offering to place him upon his own staff.*" That document :- "NAM Chelsea: Ref:- Codrington Inherited Papers : 6807/377-1-Bundle 2 - date: Jul-Oct 1854 : 23 Oct Regarding the requests of Lt Magnell [Macneill], 3rd Foot & Capt Nolan, 15 Hussars to be attached to one of the Cavalry Regts." reads as follows:-

Horse Guards.
23 October 1854.
My Lord,

I have had the honor to lay before The General Commanding-in-Chief your Lordship's letters of the 1st and 3rd Instant, the first forwarding, for the favourable consideration of Viscount Hardinge, an application from Lieutenant Macneill of the 3rd Foot to be appointed to one of the Regiments of Cavalry serving in the Army under your Lordship's Command, the other forwarding a similar application from Captain Nolan on the Half Pay of the 15th Hussars and Aide-de-Camp to Brigadier General Airey to be brought on the Full Pay of one of those Regiments.

Viscount Hardinge desires me in reply to express the satisfaction it would afford him to give effect to the application of Officers of whom your Lordship entertains so favourable an opinion; but he apprehends there must be a great difficulty in these cases, as, in the event of a vacancy occurring in a Regiment employed on such a service as that in which the Army under your Lordship's command is engaged, he would be very unwilling not to recommend the Senior of the next Rank for promotion, unless in some case in

which you should think it ought not to be given in that manner and should communicate that opinion to him.

Viscount Hardinge can therefore only express his disposition to be of service to these Officers if a fair opportunity should offer.

I have the honor to be

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient
humble Servant.

C. Yorke

Raglan has scrawled a two-word note in the margin. Sadly, the first word cannot be deciphered, but the second may read as "demand" or "dismissed", followed by the initial "R". Before this discouraging advice from Horse Guards, I take it that Raglan was in accord with Macneill and Nolan's applications for transfer to one of the Cavalry regiments. These requests could only have been placed with the approval of commanding officers - for Nolan that would have been QMG Richard Airey and Cardigan. How ironic that Nolan, after gaining high-level favour, missed his chance to serve in the Cavalry - only to be falsely discredited by Raglan and falsely castigated by many as the prime author of a British military debacle!

A defensible scenario for the crowded final minutes of the life of Captain Lewis Edward Nolan is at last achievable, as follows:-

1. Before 11 a.m., in discussion with Raglan and Airey, Nolan is given verbal instructions, but is called back and handed the written 4th Order, which he does not read. Raglan calls to Nolan "*Tell Lord Lucan that the cavalry is to attack immediately!*"
2. Nolan meets Lucan, Civilian Interpreter Blunt and Trumpet Major Henry Joy at BH, near R5. (Guns and enemy are not visible from that location.)
3. Nolan delivers the written 4th Order and tells Lucan - "*Lord Raglan orders you to attack the enemy & retake the guns!*". (Captain Soame Jenyns, 13th Light Dragoons - letter of 27th October, 1854 - Cambridgeshire Record Office).
4. Lucan queries the verbal "*Attack immediately!*" Order but otherwise ignores Nolan.
5. Nolan gestures vaguely eastwards and exclaims "*There, My Lord, is your enemy, there are your guns!*" - without clarification.
6. According to John Blunt, the eyewitness, Lucan does not question Nolan further and Nolan does not insist on passing on Airey's verbal instructions.
7. Lucan, Nolan, Blunt and Joy move to the Light Brigade front to locate Cardigan.
8. Lucan tells Cardigan of the order but apparently does not share either the written 4th Order or Nolan's "retake" instruction. Cardigan remonstrates (rightly) and is overruled.
9. Lucan orders the 11th Hussars from the front line of the Light Brigade back in support. Lucan, Joy and Blunt move towards the Heavy Brigade front in the North Valley. Lucan hands the written 4th Order to Blunt and tells him not to follow. (Blunt moves towards **R5**.) Lucan and Joy proceed to direct the Heavy Brigade to support the Light Brigade.

10. Nolan has an altercation with Cardigan, allegedly saying "*Is the Light Cavalry afraid?*"³¹.
11. Cardigan orders the (right) 1st squadron of the 17th Lancers as the "*Squadron of Direction*".
12. Nolan joins Captain William Morris before the 17th Lancers with an intention to "*lead them on!*". Cardigan orders the Light Brigade to "*Walk, Trot, March!*". The Brigade moves off.
13. Nolan leaves the centre of the 17th Lancers, gestures "*Right engage!*" with his sword and orders the 17th Lancers to angle "*Threes right!*" - towards the Causeway Heights.
14. Captain John Winter's (left) 2nd squadron of the 17th Lancers starts to angle "*Threes right!*", but they are ordered back into line by Cardigan, echoed by Corporal Nunnerley.
15. The 17th Lancers pause to reform their line - wrongly seen as a "*Lower curb chains!*" operation by a French observer. That is not a British Cavalry action.
16. Nolan crosses diagonally in front of Cardigan, pointing and heading towards the Causeway Heights while shouting "...almost like a Maniac "*Come on, come on!*" (Raglan¹⁸) or "...screeching like a madman to the Brigade, Are you not coming on, follow me!" (Gage). N.B.: The "follow me!" accords with Nolan's "I'll take and lead them on!" and with the "Queens Regulations".
17. Cardigan tries (but fails) to interrogate Nolan.
18. Nolan screams as he is killed by a shell fragment and "*freezes*" with his right arm high. It appears that Nolan's body was locked in an immediate cadaveric spasm, with his sword-arm raised, at the moment of his death. His horse turns to its right and moves back through the squadron interval of the 13th Light Dragoons. His body is dragged and kicked by his horse before detaching from the stirrup.²³

An obituary of Nolan appeared in "*The Illustrated London News*" on Nov. 25, 1854. It included:- "...We are aware that in the first accounts of the disastrous charge at Balaclava, blame was hastily attached to Captain Nolan, who, it was alleged, had gone beyond the terms of an order which he was instructed to deliver to Lord Lucan; his memory has, however, we are glad to find, been subsequently vindicated from so grave an imputation, and all who knew him best in the closest relations of military life, and his punctilious character on all points of duty, assert that he would have been the last man to be guilty of the indiscretion attributed to him. In fact, the rash movement in question was so opposed to his own published theory on the subject, that he could never have willingly countenanced, much less directed it, even under an excess of zeal. ...All these errors were made, however, under some horrible delusion. The Light Cavalry galloped, open-eyed, into destruction as complete as if they had fallen into an ambushade. Who can doubt that if they had had to charge any reasonable number of Russian infantry or cavalry, clear of the batteries, that they would have ridden them down? As it was, they sabred the artillerymen at their guns. Captain Nolan was struck on the heart by one of the first shells, gave a loud cry, and died instantly. His horse turned and galloped back with his dead rider firm in his saddle."

Early in 1855, a plaque in memory of Nolan was placed in Holy Trinity Church, Maidstone - the Garrison Church of the Cavalry Division.

Significantly, Airey as well as friends from his days in India subscribed to it. The original text read "IN MEMORY OF CAPTAIN LEWIS EDWARD NOLAN, CAPTAIN IN THE 15TH OR KING'S HUSSARS, AND A.D.C. TO MAJOR GENERAL AIREY, QUARTER MASTER GENERAL TO THE FORCES IN THE CRIMEA. HE FELL AT THE HEAD OF THE LIGHT CAVALRY BRIGADE, IN THE CHARGE AT BALAKLAVA ON THE 25TH OCTOBER 1854, AGED 36. GENERAL SIR GEORGE BERKELEY K.C.B., GENERAL AIREY, HIS BROTHER OFFICERS, AND OTHER FRIENDS, HAVE ERECTED THIS TABLET AS A SLIGHT TRIBUTE OF THEIR ESTEEM AND AFFECTIONATE REGARD, FOR THE MEMORY OF ONE OF THE MOST GALLANT, INTELLIGENT, AND ENERGETIC OFFICERS IN HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE."

That plaque (**Figure 8**) was stolen from the derelict church in 2006. A new memorial (**Figure 9**), with the same wording, was erected nearby in 2013.

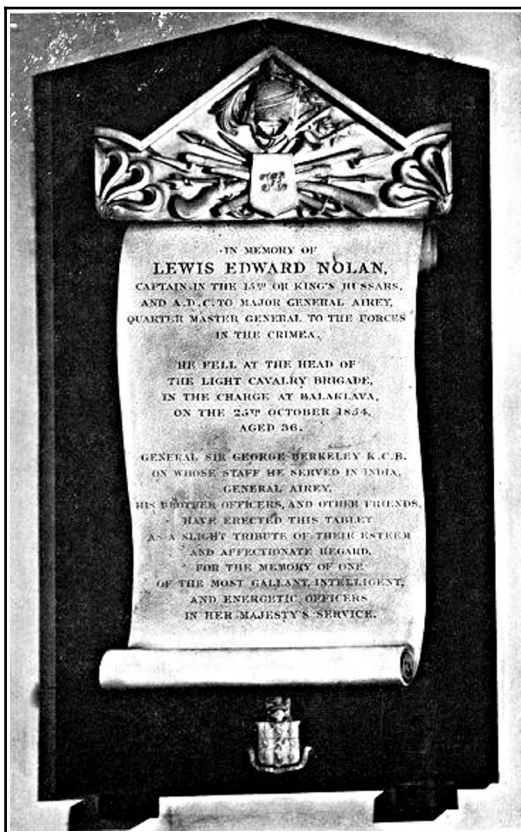


Figure 8: Nolan's Memorial Plaque Memorial, Maidstone



Figure 9: Nolan's new

After his return to England, Cardigan enjoyed many months of adulation and speech-making before doubts about his conduct (particularly his absence from the Battle of Inkerman) emerged. He was made Inspector-General of Cavalry. While the government recommended him for the Order of the Garter, he was instead awarded the KCB in July, 1855.

Reportedly, Airey never spoke about Balaklava in later life...

SUMMARY:- I am convinced that Raglan, with his insistence on the emotionally important (but tactically needless) recovery of guns and his rejecting Canrobert's good advice to the contrary, was **BY FAR** the guilty party. Airey, Lucan and Nolan were clearly at fault, but to lesser degrees.

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